



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Montana WILD Center Outdoor Gazebo

2. Type of Proposed Action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to construct an outdoor classroom and gazebo (Outdoor Gazebo) at the Montana WILD Center education facility, which is integrated with Spring Meadow Lake State Park, to be used for conservation education and recreation purposes.

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

The proposed Montana WILD Center Outdoor Gazebo is located on the grounds of the Montana WILD Center in Helena, Montana, off US Highway 12, at 2668 Broadwater Avenue, Helena, MT, 59602, Section 23, Township 10 North, Range 4 West (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Location of FWP Montana WILD Center proposed Outdoor Gazebo, Helena, Montana

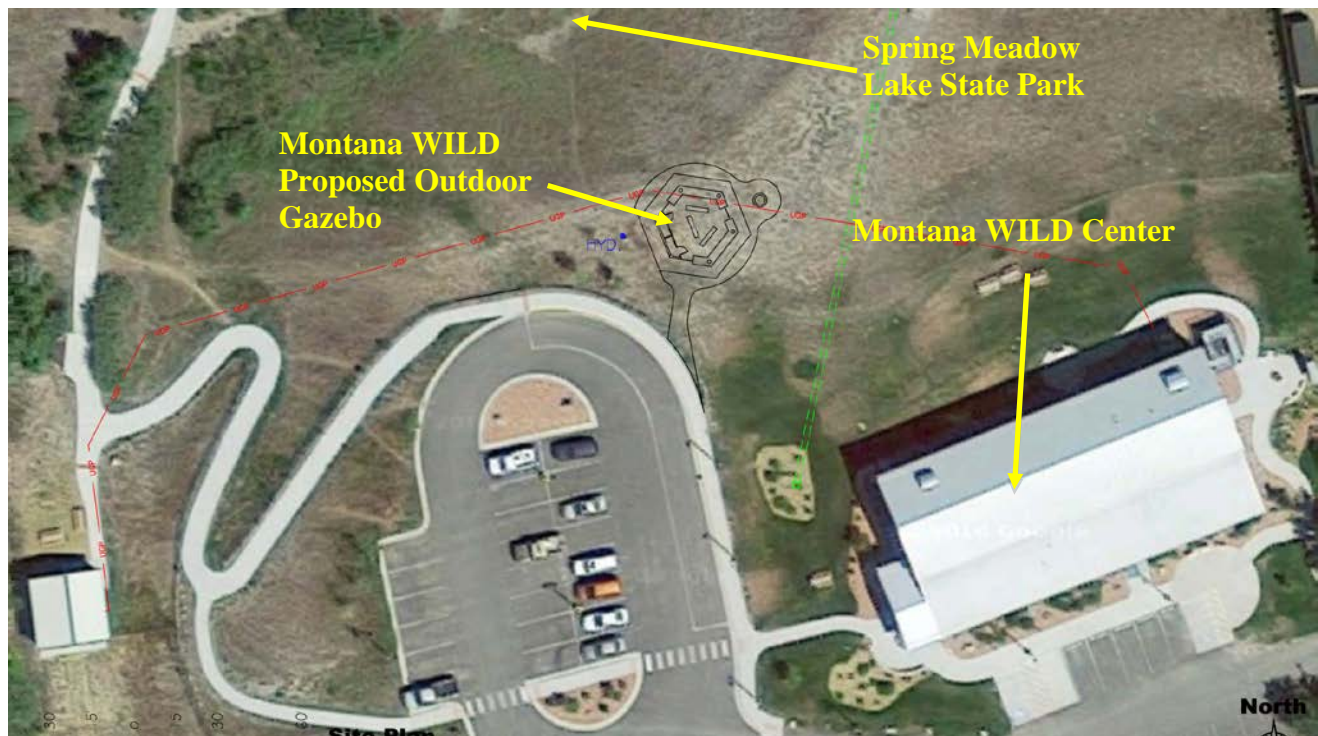


Figure 2. Proposed Montana WILD Center Outdoor Gazebo

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:

The 1939 Montana State Legislature passed MCA 23-1-101, which states that a State Park System would be established “for the purpose of conserving the scenic, historic, archeological, scientific and recreational resources of the state and providing for their use and enjoyment, thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational and economic life of the people and their health.” Montana statute 23-1-102 (4) gives FWP “jurisdiction, custody and control of all state parks, recreational areas, public camping grounds, historical sites and monuments.” FWP developed the *2014–2018 Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* to address outdoor recreation priorities in Montana, including: 1) To strengthen connections between outdoor recreation, healthy lifestyles, public safety, and livable communities; 2) To protect and enhance Montana’s natural, cultural, and heritage assets by growing a responsible recreation land ethic among residents and visitors; and 3) To promote a seamless system or coordinated management among recreation providers and agencies at all levels.

5. Need for the Action(s):

The Montana WILD Center is FWP’s flagship conservation education center and is open and accessible to all visitors. Since its completion in 2012, the Montana WILD Center has experienced exponential growth in both visitation and program offerings. Currently, more than 30,000 people visit the facility annually. The 65-acre complex of the Montana WILD Center and Spring Meadow Lake State Park, located on the outskirts of Helena, received 172,000 visitors in 2015, a 25% increase from 2014. An extensive network of walking trails provides opportunities and access for a wide variety of recreational activities. The Outdoor Gazebo will provide year-round shelter for outdoor education and recreation programs, where no other covered outdoor gathering space exists. It will serve as a focal point, launching pad, meeting place, and outdoor classroom to further integrate and strengthen the value of the larger Complex for diverse public use and outdoor recreation

in the state. When not in official use, the Outdoor Gazebo will be available to the public for a variety of uses including outdoor picnics and family gatherings among others.

6. Objectives for the Action(s):

The objective of the proposed project is to construct an outdoor classroom and gazebo (Outdoor Gazebo) at the Montana WILD Center education facility, including surrounding pathways and landscaping, providing for year-round shelter for outdoor recreation and education programs and assembly space (Figure 2). The space will serve public visitors and school groups from throughout Montana.

7. Project Size: estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:

The proposed project would involve approximately one-third acre, which would include the footprint of the gazebo structure and any surrounding pathways or landscaping adjacent to the structure. The footprint of the structure itself is anticipated to be roughly 1,000 square feet (35' x 35').

8. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):

The Montana WILD Center proposed Outdoor Gazebo would be located on approximately one-third acre of public land owned in fee title by FWP. The property is not located within a floodplain and there are no permanent surface waters or wetlands on the project site. The project site also does not provide critical habitat for any sensitive wildlife species. The Outdoor Gazebo would provide a year-round sheltered facility for outdoor education and recreation programs, including school visits, lectures, presentations, campfire talks, events, and other conservation education programs.

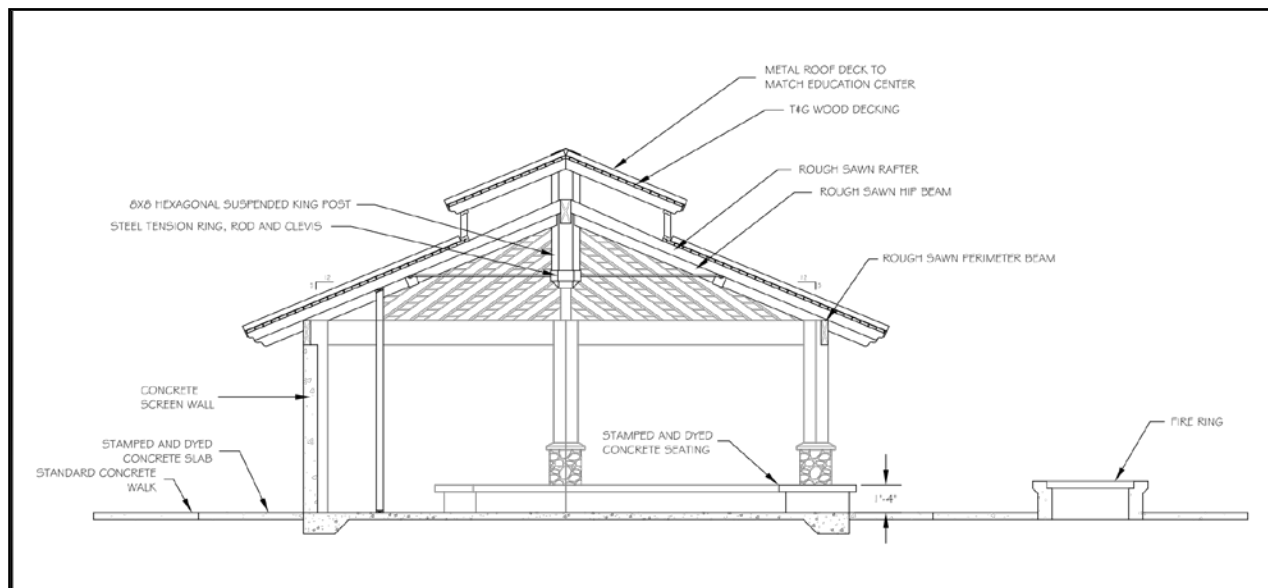


Figure 3. Proposed Montana WILD Center Outdoor Gazebo Concept

9. Description of Project:

FWP proposes the construction of an Outdoor Gazebo at the Montana WILD Center in Helena, MT. The requested grant funds will be used to support the construction of the Outdoor Gazebo, including the cost of site preparation, including construction of a foundation and walkways; design and construction of the structure; installation of power to the structure; landscaping; and miscellaneous costs. The structure and associated landscaping and walkways will compliment the Montana WILD Center building, the 65-acre Montana WILD

Complex, and the overall natural and historical surroundings. The structure will be rustic in appearance with a historic flair, and casual in nature to be durable and suitable for extensive and lasting outdoor use.

The structure will be round, square or octagon shaped and will have a two-tiered metal roof and no fully closed-in walls. One westerly facing side will have infill to provide a partial wall for speakers and presentations. All other walls will be knee-high and built of stone or wood to complement the look and feel of the site and other Montana WILD Center buildings. Metal or timber posts will support the roof the foundation will consist of a concrete slab base with a central drain. The structure will contain built-in bench seating for programming, with a central fire pit for gathering that can be locked when not in use. It will provide space for up to 40 people sitting, and space for an additional 10-20 people standing for a total of 50-60 participants at a time. The space will serve public visitors and school groups from throughout Montana. The structure will be fully ADA accessible from the existing parking lot via a short walkway. Site-appropriate landscaping and planting will underscore the message of responsible and thoughtful land use consistent with FWP's mission of shared use and resource conservation (Figure 3).

There are currently no improvements on the proposed Outdoor Gazebo site, so all improvements would be included in the project and completed during the project period.

▪ Project design and plan	\$ 12,000
▪ Outdoor Gazebo finished structure	\$ 72,000
▪ Site preparation, e.g. foundation, walkway, power	\$ 22,000
▪ Landscaping	\$ 10,000
▪ Miscellaneous costs	<u>\$ 4,000</u>

Total Project Budget **\$120,000**

10. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

None

Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
N/A		

Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund	\$60,000
Committed Matching Funds	
▪ Montana's Outdoor Legacy Foundation	\$30,000
▪ Foundation for Animals	\$20,000
▪ Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	<u>\$10,000</u>

Total Project Cost **\$120,000**

11. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups:

The proposed Outdoor Gazebo would be located on one-third acre of public land owned in fee title by FWP and no membership or day use fees will be charged for use of the facility. Outdoor educational use for the site

includes: scheduled classroom visits by schools on conservation subjects; Montana WILD programs such as *Hooked on Fishing*; evening presentations on wildlife topics for the community, youth events, and other public outreach events. The structure would also host campfire talks and a wide array of events and activities offered by community partners and friends of Montana WILD and Spring Meadow Lake State Park. In addition, the site will be used informally for picnics and a gathering space for those visiting the Montana WILD center. The Outdoor Gazebo will also serve pedestrians and bikers using the *Centennial Trail*, which will terminate at Montana WILD adjacent to the Outdoor Gazebo. The Gazebo will be a welcomed addition to the larger Helena community and a boost to public appreciation of FWP.

12. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:

Because the Montana WILD Center and proposed Outdoor Gazebo are owned and managed by FWP, there has been public involvement in the planning process. The Outdoor Gazebo proposals have been discussed with the public during public meetings and with the associated project vendors and contractors.

13. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
State Historic Preservation Office

14. Names, Address, and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

Thomas Baumeister, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620. (406) 444-9946.

15. Other Pertinent Information:

The proposed Outdoor Gazebo will serve visitors from throughout the country and school groups from throughout Montana. There is no other covered outdoor gathering place of this kind is available in Montana. The Outdoor Gazebo will serve as a focal point, launching pad, meeting place, and outdoor classroom to further integrate and strengthen the value of the larger Complex for diverse public use and outdoor recreation in the state.

PART II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A, the Proposed Alternative, and Alternative B, the No Action Alternative, were considered.

- **Alternative A (Proposed Alternative)** is as described in Part I, paragraph 9 (Description of Project): to develop an Outdoor Gazebo at the Montana WILD Center in Helena, Montana. There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative**.
- **Alternative B (No Action Alternative)** The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant money would be denied and the area would remain as is without the proposed improvements. The no action alternative would have no significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences. The Montana WILD Center would continue on with present conditions. Land use would remain the same.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented: Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent. Neither the proposed alternative nor the no action alternative would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

None. Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There was no other alternative that were deemed reasonably available, or prudent. Neither the **Proposed Alternative** nor the **No Action Alternative** would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

List and explain proposed mitigating measures (stipulations): None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmentally sensitive areas.

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		1
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		3
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		4
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		6
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		7
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		8
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		10
11. Aesthetics				X		11

1. According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, no unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are located on the proposed project site or would be affected by the project.

2. & 5. There are no delineated wetlands and no natural water sources within the area proposed for development. No critical wildlife habitat would be affected. No Threatened or Endangered species,

as listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, would be affected by the proposed project. The proposed Outdoor Gazebo is located in an area previously disturbed by development, first by the Stedman Foundry and later by construction of Montana WILD Center and parking lot, so it is unlikely that any resident or transient wildlife would be affected during construction.

3. No new species would be introduced into the area. FWP already manages weeds on the property so any inadvertent introduction of a new weed species would be controlled.

4. The proposed Outdoor Gazebo will be constructed on a small parcel within a developed area of Helena so the proposed project will not change the overall abundance and diversity of plant species within the area.

6. No water rights would be affected by the proposed project.

7. The proposed project will cause limited displacement of soils but the developments will not substantially effect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures will be in effect and disturbed area will be reseeded.

8. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during construction. However, the construction time is short and human effects will be temporary.

9. FWP contacted the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to seek a concurrence on FWP recommendations for the project. If cultural materials are discovered during construction, work would cease and SHPO would be contacted for a more in-depth investigation.

10. The proposed project would exert no additional demands on environmental resources of land, water, air, and energy.

11. The property is located on an area previously disturbed by commercial development so the proposed project will have no additional impact on the aesthetics of the property.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		1
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		7
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

1. The proposed Outdoor Gazebo is located within a commercially developed area and will have no impact on the social structures and cultural diversity of the community.

7. The proposed developments will increase recreational and outdoor educational opportunities within the community.

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. The proposed project is not complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The proposed project would be located on a site previously disturbed by construction of the Montana WILD Center and parking lot and, together with the insignificant environmental effects of the proposed action, indicates that this

should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative.

FWP's Proposed Alternative, to develop an Outdoor Gazebo at the Montana WILD Center, is supported by FWP and the public. Therefore, FWP should approve the Proposed Alternative (A) for the improvements as outlined in Part I, Paragraph 9.

PART V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? Individually, the proposed actions have minor impacts. However, it was determined that there are no significant or potentially significant cumulatively impacts. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative; therefore, an EIS is not required.

PART VI. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

- Thomas Baumeister, 1420 E. 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620. (406) 444-9946.
- Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by:

Andrea Darling, Darling Natural Resource Consulting, Montana City, MT 59634

Date Completed:

May 2, 2017

Describe public involvement, if any:

This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site and through a legal ad in the *Independent Record, Helena, MT* announcing a public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period.